Love and Revolution

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CHAPTER 1

It was late summer, and at that time the war had not yet come so close to home.

Oh, they were anticipating war. Everyone knew about Bunker Hill. They knew about Lexington and Concord. They knew about the great hero Washington forcing the Redcoats out of Boston. They knew the British had their eyes on the nearby port of New York and had landed troops on Staten Island. There was chatter at the general store about the King's heavily-armed warships that choked New York Harbor and the two that sailed up the Hudson and docked at Tarrytown before heading to North Point, causing rejoicing among the much-beleaguered Tories, who believed deliverance was at hand, and striking terror into everyone else. News had come very recently about the Declaration of Independence, which was read publicly, openly, throughout the colonies, and for the first time in White Plains, their hometown, from the steps of the courthouse.

Yes, war seemed inevitable, in the sense that such a thing could even be imagined by people accustomed to peace in their quiet country town. But as of yet there was no war. There were dreamy summer days, like any other summer. There were lovers' walks in the meadows with the sun shining and the hazy blue skies of August. There were the birds of summer, the white-tailed hawks and mockingbirds and scarlet tanagers, which incidentally reminded everyone of the Redcoats. The Redcoats themselves, however, still seemed more like a story in press and pamphlets than something that was soon to become part of their everyday lives.

"Your face is red, little Rachel; I take it your fair skin is not used to the sun," Charles Taylor teased his attractive young visitor.

"My skin has had its fair share of the sun in the garden. But it may be the exertion of walking."

Rachel had her father's sense of humor without her mother's shrewish tongue. She was not afraid to respond to Mr. Taylor when he teased her because she sensed he liked it

"No doubt you were in a great hurry to get here. But your father might have spared you a horse. I hope he was not afraid of me impounding it as a sort of *tax* on his stable."

"I would never think of asking for a horse during haying season. And besides, I love to walk at this time of year. I love the tiger lilies and Queen Anne's lace, soon to be gone."

"Queen Anne! I should think you would want to avoid *her* at all costs, being a good Patriot girl."

"They memorialize the grandmother, I believe. Therefore I feel safe in admiring them."

"Ah, you are a clever girl! Still, no daughter of mine would walk three miles in the hot summer sun, for the sake of her complexion. My sons, however, can be as ruddy as they like. I do not approve of these modern dandies who fancy themselves 'gentlemen' and never do an honest day's work outdoors. Do you?"

"Not at all. An honest man is not afraid to come into the sun."

Rachel was there to see Mr. Taylor's older son, the one tacitly alluded to when he accused her of rushing. It had not been her intention to come into the house, but Mrs. Taylor insisted on it and gave her some cool tea in her own favorite pewter cup.

She stood demurely by the window while she waited for John to appear. Mr. Taylor was a Tory, but he was an intelligent man and better-educated than anyone else she knew in her small town, having gone to the great university at Edinburgh. She was not afraid to spar respectfully with him, just as her mother did with men who ventured into her lair. She was also happy to bear some good-natured abuse, since he was John's father.

John came in a moment later with his sister Elsie, who had been sent by their mother to fetch him from the barn, where he and their brother Edwin had been engaged in the endless task of sawing and splitting firewood for the long winter.

"Ah! Here he comes. It seems you have a visitor, young man."

"So I do," John replied, in as few words as possible, feeling abashed in Rachel's presence with prying eyes upon them. "Do you want to go outside?" he said to her—and then became even more flustered as his words echoed around the room.

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather stay here and chat?" his father teased.

"Let them go," his wife said. "The young people need to talk."

So off they went. Charles watched them with a broad smile as they approached the barn and eventually disappeared from view. But then the distortion of the hand-blown glass gave him a queasy feeling, and a wave of melancholy swept over him. For all his bluff cheerfulness, his heart was full of apprehension about the future.

He and Ruth had purchased their brick farmhouse and two hundred acres thirty years earlier for a price that would have seemed unimaginable in their native Scotland. Opportunity and land were scarce at home; nor did Charles care for the politics that were current at the time, with "foreigners" on the throne in the aftermath of Culloden.

He was able to talk Ruth into making the great change not long after they were married, in spite of her deep attachment to home, for the prospect of freedom and prosperity. They worked hard and were happy for many years. The land in the Hudson Valley was much richer than anything they had known in Scotland, and the wheat crops did quite well.

Lately, however, he had begun to wonder if the move had been a mistake. First came the long, bloody war with the French and their dreaded Indian allies, which did not touch White Plains directly but was a source of anxiety in all of the colonies, since it was not clear which of the great powers would prevail. Then came the taxation firestorm as a result of those wars and a growing division between the firebrand Patriots, who were holding forth with increasing boldness about liberty and self-government, and the conservative so-called Loyalists, who felt an attachment to the Crown and old ties.

Charles Taylor was a Loyalist by nature and reason as well as by birth. He knew England had her faults—he was a Scot, after all—but he was not ready to abandon her ancient, benevolent and orderly patronage, as he saw it, for uncertain government by a ragtag collection of colonial hotheads. Charles did not particularly like Grenville's Stamp Tax, or the Townshend Act, or the Tea Act, being a great tea-lover himself; but he could not be blind to the reasonableness of the argument. It did not seem strange to him that the colonies should contribute to their own defense, regardless of whether they had representation in Parliament.

Unlike native-born colonists, he was used to paying taxes to the Crown and did not share their childish pique—as he saw it—at being asked to do so themselves. As for the "Intolerable Acts," that was just another incendiary label from the mayhem mongers. To his way of thinking, those acts were nothing more than an attempt to restore order out of chaos. But order was *not* restored. On the contrary; things became much worse. Some of the colonies formed their own provincial legislatures. Tories were banned from having any role, which in Charles's view meant these legislatures were not representative at all, and showed the radicals to be just as autocratic as the autocrats they despised.

The final outrage to Tory sensibilities, however, was the Declaration of Independence. The Patriots applauded its bold and colorful language, but the feelings of the Loyalists on this subject were less cordial, since this very boldness seemed to sever them from the source of their identity as Englishmen, and, in the view of many, would lead to economic ruin. No longer were the leading politicians resisting specific excesses of royal rule; now they wanted to throw off the yoke entirely and form their own "more perfect" union. This was a momentous change, and, from the Loyalist point of view, fraught with peril.

Charles did not like change. He had a tendency to cling to what was fond and familiar. English life and English customs were solid and respectable; moreover, they were *his* customs. The thought of throwing them away filled him with dismay. Also he had a natural abhorrence for loud-mouthed rabble-rousers like Patrick Henry and Charles Adams, who seemed willing to tear down everything good but had nothing sensible to offer in its place. He read their pamphlets. He saw through their rhetoric, their lies and omissions, their devices. He saw how they manipulated the truth. All his friends did. Why didn't everyone?

The situation seemed patently unfair. It was not the Tories who were stirring up trouble in the colonies; they were content to live in peace and prosper. No, it was evil spawn like the Sons of Liberty. They were the ones who were the avowed enemies of the status quo, who declared themselves to be on a holy crusade and seemed to have no qualms about violence. No Loyalist was safe where they spread their poison. There had been vicious attacks for over a decade in Boston, and even some in New York, in spite of its sizeable Loyalist population, including the recent riots in Manhat-

tan. Charles lived in perpetual anxiety about his own beloved family and what might happen to them if the radicals actually succeeded.

And now there was the prospect of war. The colonial hotheads had started a fight they could not possibly win and dragged everyone else into it with them, including those who had no desire to break with their homeland. Charles was not for war. What he wanted was to be left alone and work his farm in peace. But this no longer seemed possible. He had every confidence in England's splendid army and navy, having seen them up close as a young man. There was no question in his mind that they would crush the shabby Continentals. But at what cost to him and his family? Would the hotheads be content with hot words when it came to "Loyalists"? Or would they attempt something worse?

Ruth came to him with a mug of beer as a peace offering for her rebuke. She was a thin woman whose handsomeness had faded with childbearing and the hard work of making her way in a new land without the community support of family or friends. She had a mild disposition in spite of a somewhat severe appearance and a passionate love for her husband and family.

"You and Rachel seemed to be enjoying yourselves."

"She is a remarkable girl. It is rare to see such intelligence and self-possession in someone so young; and she has even read some books, unlike our own dawdling offspring. I don't see how she can have such a father, but the girl herself is remarkable."

"She cannot help her father. She seems a very respectful, kind young lady to me."

"Aye, that she is. And I enjoy talking to her," he admitted.

"You seem to enjoy teasing her, and you do not tease people unless you like them."

He patted her hand. "Now, now. I understand you. She is a good-humored girl. To tell the truth I almost cannot help teasing her. But I wish she did not have such a father, a stubborn man by all accounts who will not listen to reason. And her mother! That harridan terrorizes the whole town. How could God make such a woman with a serpent for a tongue?"

"But you will be kind to her in spite of all that, for your son's sake. I believe he is very much in love."

"Love! Bah! What do these young bucks know about that? Five minutes of rhapsody followed by fifty years of servitude. But I knew where you were angling. I'm an angler myself. You want to

see them together. I have no objection to it for its own sake. But I wish the girl did not have such a father."

"You would not oppose them, I hope."

"I have no desire to oppose them, but you must acknowledge the times. War is in the air and there is likely to be a good deal of bloodshed and conflict between those who are determined to have their own country and people like me who prefer to honor our obligations. The line has been drawn because of outspoken Patriots like her father. He makes himself my enemy. What am I to do?"

"But think of your son and his happiness. You see what he is like when he's with her."

"Come, come; I already said I have nothing against the girl. But I am in no position to be making promises. Passion is the master of the times. We do not know where we will be in five years. How can we talk about weddings?"

This conversation was vexing to Ruth. She loved her husband but was afraid of his temper; afraid that his strong opinions would put their family in jeopardy. She herself did not have strong feelings about the present troubles. She felt the same tug as her husband to the land of her birth, but it was in her nature to make her nest wherever she was. Were the colonies to remain colonies or were they to be free? It did not much matter, in her mind. All she cared about was the well-being of the people she loved.

And something else—she very much wanted John to marry Rachel Allen. They were perfect for each other. John was shy, a kind young man who needed someone to draw him out. Rachel was outgoing, and she could see that she loved him. She wanted happiness for both of her sons; especially for John. But the future seemed like a blur to her now.